

RECOGNIZE THE GOOD WORK BEING DONE BY ENGINEERS AND LAND SURVEYORS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

(THEY PLAY BY A MORE CHALLENGING SET OF RULES)

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Introduction

You often hear engineering and land surveying consultants complain about their public agency clients. Why does this happen? What is the danger of lumping all public agencies into the same stereotypical group? Why is it important to recognize engineers and land surveyors who are working hard in public service?

This article answers those questions.

Why do we complain about our public agency clients?

I know it's happened to you. While sitting around a table at a lunch or dinner event for engineers or land surveyors, a story begins. A member of the dinner party relates a horrifying experience with a government agency involved in their project. This story could be about a government agency approving the project, or it could be the government agency is the project owner.

Soon everyone at the table is sharing their own similar story.

Why does this happen? For a few of reasons:

- 1] Many consultant engineers have local government agencies as their main type of client.
- 2] There are public agencies that work to be good clients, and there are public agencies that are bad clients.
- 3] At times even good public agency clients act bad, especially when their municipal attorneys get involved.

Our relationship with public agencies is like a marriage in this important way:

We spend a lot of time working together. As a result, we get to know each other very well. This includes each partner in the relationship dealing with flaws and

imperfections in the other partner.

The intention of this article isn't to sugar coat the situation. In my 16 years as a land surveyor, I've seen people in public agencies do very bad things. This includes breaking the law and engaging in unethical behavior.

The temptation as private consultants is to use this bad behavior by a few public agencies as an excuse. We use it as an excuse to lump all public agencies into the same pile of horrible clients.

What challenges to great engineers and land surveyors in public service face?

The engineers and land surveyors working in public service face several challenges that we don't deal with in the private sector. These challenges include:

- 1] The burdens of laws and regulations that make their organizations less flexible and adaptable.
- 2] Mandates from the state and federal government that are unfunded.
- 3] Ridiculous strings attached to federal and state funding for their projects.
- 4] Unreliable sources of funding for

infrastructure design and maintenance.

5] Bands and factions within the group of citizens they serve. These groups often have very strong, and opposing viewpoints.

In addition, the leaders of the agencies in our local governments face these additional challenges:

- 1] Restrictions on their ability to hire, fire, and promote workers.
- 2] The demands of their agency legal team or elected leaders. Often these lawyers and politicians understand very little about land surveying or engineering.
- 3] A hostile regulatory environment. This rules and regulations have only made maintenance and construction more difficult over the past few decades.

When we recognize these challenges as private consultants, we begin to understand why it is so important to recognize great work by engineers and land surveyors in

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the public sector.

Why is it important to recognize great work by engineers and land surveyors in the public sector?

Most of us appreciate a little bit of recognition for our hard work and accomplishments. Engineers and land surveyors in the public sector are no different. In many situations, citizens fail to notice their work or fail to appreciate it. In the worst situations, we brand these professionals as leeches on human society taking advantage of the tax payer.

Why is it important for us to recognize the great work by engineers and land surveyors in the public sector?

I will give you a few reasons:

- 1] These surveyors and engineers set a great example for their peers.
- 2] Outstanding examples of hard work in the public sector provide a sharp contrast to the laziness and abuse of public funds that also occur.
- 3] These surveyors and engineers are delivering good value to the taxpayers. This is a group in which all private sector engineers and land surveyors are members.

4] Hardworking engineers and land surveyors in the public sector are often our best clients. They understand our work, and they value the flexible services we provide.

All of the reasons I listed above merit recognition by private consultants in the engineering and surveying community.

How can you recognize our local agencies in Central California that are setting a good example in the way they handle the engineering and surveying aspects of their organization?

What can you do to recognize great engineers and land surveyors in public service? Here are a few suggestions:

- 1] Thank them in person for their work.
- 2] Recognize their dedication and accomplishments in your local professional associations and publications.
- 3] Publish a profile of their recent projects or

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programs on your company web-site.

4] Send them a thank you note from your team. Include personal signatures from your team members.

Conclusion

There are public agencies that perform poorly. There are engineers and surveyors in public agencies that break the law and waste taxpayer money. However, there is also a danger to stereotype all engineers and surveyors in the public sector as lazy and unproductive. This isn't reality. There are engineers and surveyors in public service that work hard and provide good stewardship of public funds. These professionals face challenges that we don't have to overcome in the private sector. Recognizing the hard work of the engineers in public service has many benefits, including the promotion of good examples of public service for everyone in the engineering and surveying professions.

"Leaders of public agencies that perform engineering and surveying face unique challenges. These challenges include the restrictions on their ability to hire, fire and promote workers."